## Why Test Your Soil?

Soil testing is again being actively promoted this fall by extension agents, fertilizer dealers, agronomists, and other workers in the agricultural industry. Why the concerted effort to test soil? Here are 10 good reasons:

1. Determine fertilizer needs. A soil test indicates which nutrients are limiting in the soil and tells how much fertilizer is needed for optimum yields. It takes the guess work out of fertilizing.

2. Determine lime needs. A soil test also indicates whether or not lime is needed and, if so, how much. If a soil is too acid and is not limed, yields will be low no matter how much fertilizer is applied. Fertilizing when the soil is too acid is a waste of money! By the same token, apply lime indiscriminately (i.e. without a soil test) may reduce crop yields.

3. Save money. Soil testing helps prevent overapplication of fertilizer, which not only reduces profits but which can be a potential source of pollution. In this time of greater ecological awareness, it pays in more ways than one to test your soil.

4. Utilize agricultural research. Appreciable amounts of money are spent each year on agricultural research to improve food and fiber production in the United States. This research is conducted by land-grant colleges (such as VPI&SU) and USDA experiment stations across the country. This money can be utilized very effectively by taking advantage of soil testing, where recommendations are based on sound research.

5. Determine type of lime material needed. Soil testing, by measuring the levels of calcium and magnesium in the soil, provides information on the type of lime material needed for optimum growth. For example, if a soil is low in magnesium, a dolomitic limestone (which is high in magnesium) will be recommended.

6. Detect potential minor element needs. For certain crops and in certain areas in Virginia, one or more minor or trace elements have been found to be deficient in soils and will hold back yields if not applied. Testing for these potentially eficient trace elements will insure that they will not limit yields.

7. Identify causes of poor crop growth. Soil testing helps determine if problem areas in fields where crops are growing abnormally are the result of an imbalance in soil fertility. It is the quickest method of detecting soil fertility problems and, if fertility is not the problem, it at least has served to eliminate one potential source of the poor growth.

8. Determine necessary adjustments in herbicide application rate. Certain herbicides are held or "tied up" by organic matter in the soil and, because of this, a soil test for organic matter will provide information useful in determining the rate of these herbicides that will be required for optimum weed control. While the organic matter level of the soil changes very little over time for a given crop rotation, it is useful to have this test run once every five years or so.

9. Help reduce erosion losses. Soil testing, when used to detect areas of low fertility and provide fertilization and liming information will help to insure that plant cover is optimum, thereby reducing soil erosion losses.

10. Protects cropping investment. The cost of seed, machinery, labor, etc. adds to a sizeable investment in a crop production program today. With present low farm prices, one cannot afford to gamble with fertilizing and liming. Soil testing protects your investment by insuring that your crop's fertility needs will be accurately met. Don't guess! Soil test! For more information, contact The Appomattox County Extension Office.

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